

**CITY OF SEATTLE
ANALYSIS AND DECISION OF THE DIRECTOR
OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DESIGN, CONSTRUCTION AND LAND USE**

Applicant Name: Department of Design, Construction and Land Use

Address of Proposal: Northgate Urban Center and Overlay District, Seattle

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED ACTION

The proposal is a legislative action to amend Section 23.41.010 of the Seattle Municipal Code approving the Northgate Urban Center and Overlay District Design Guidelines.

The following approval is required:

SEPA - Environmental Determination - Chapter 25.05, Seattle Municipal Code.

SEPA DETERMINATION: ☐ Exempt ☒ DNS ☐ MDNS ☐ EIS

Proposal

The Department of Design Construction and Land Use (DCLU) is recommending that amendments to SMC Chapter 23.41 be undertaken to adopt neighborhood-specific design guidelines for the Northgate Urban Center and Overlay District.

Public Comments

The development of neighborhood-specific design guidelines reflects a lengthy community effort to build support for guidelines that address the unique conditions of the Northgate area. The neighborhood spent many volunteer hours to develop these guidelines. Neighborhood guidelines are specifically intended to augment the existing *Citywide Design Guidelines for Multi-family and Commercial Development*.

Proposed changes to the Land Use Code require City Council approval. Public comment will be taken on the proposed amendments during future Council hearings.

What is Design Review? The design review process, as provided for in the Land Use Code Chapter 23.41, is intended to be a forum for community members, developers, architects, and city staff, aided by citizen design review boards, to identify design-related concerns early in the design development of a project to ensure that new development makes positive contributions to Seattle's neighborhoods. Design Review is a component of a Master Use Permit (MUP) application and is required for new commercial, multi-

family and mixed-use developments that exceed SEPA thresholds in specific zones. The design review process provides flexibility in the application of development standards through the granting of “design departures.” Departures are granted when it is demonstrated that the modification of a prescriptive Code standard would result in a better overall building design through an improved response to unique site conditions or the compelling character of the surrounding area.

Design Guidelines. Citywide Design Guidelines apply to all proposed new development undergoing design review. They are a compilation of broad urban design principles intended to address such aspects of development as site planning, height, bulk and scale relationships, architectural elements, landscaping, and the pedestrian environment. Zoning rules and prescriptive standards are intended to establish the primary use, intensity and scale of development in a specific zone, while design guidelines and the design review process fine tune a development and ensure that it responds appropriately to the context of its surroundings and allows for flexibility in return.

As part of a citywide neighborhood planning process, many neighborhoods expressed an interest in augmenting the City-wide Design Guidelines. Neighborhood design guidelines are intended to reveal the unique character of a given neighborhood, to call one's attention to the specific goals for neighborhood development, the key locations for important design considerations, and thereby protect, to the extent feasible, the qualities and values that a specific neighborhood shares in the face of changes. Where the City Council has adopted neighborhood design guidelines (University Community, Roosevelt, Pike-Pine, Ballard Municipal Center area, West Seattle Junction, Admiral and Green Lake), new development must respond to both the neighborhood and the *City-wide Design Guidelines*.

The Northgate Urban Center and Overlay District Design Guidelines are the ninth set of neighborhood-specific design guidelines (guidelines for South Lake Union are currently under consideration) to be considered for adoption by the City Council. The design guidelines are a key implementation strategy of the 1993 Northgate Area Comprehensive Plan.

Residents, businesses, and property owners in the Northgate area outlined a vision to guide the future development of the neighborhood. The future envisioned is an evolved physical environment, from a predominantly large site, auto-oriented, parking dominated retail environment, to a vital, aesthetically pleasing pedestrian oriented environment; maintaining opportunities for business and housing growth.

ANALYSIS - SEPA

The initial disclosure of the potential impacts from this proposal was made in environmental checklists prepared by DCLU. The information in this checklist, review of the proposed text changes and the recommendations, and the experience of the lead agency with review of similar projects form the basis for this analysis and decision.

Short-term Impacts

As a non-project action, the proposed amendment will not have any short-term impact on the environment. Future development affected by this legislation and subject to SEPA will be required to address short-term impacts on the environment.

Long-term Impacts

Zoning in Northgate establishes the rules that govern how much development can occur. The rules governing zoning within the Northgate area is further modified by the provisions of the Northgate Overlay District further defining the overall height, bulk and scale of development and the density of development whether office, retail or residential. Parking amounts, location, and access are set under zoning, as well. Design guidelines refine a building that might otherwise meet zoning standards and address, for instance, how the design of the building may influence the perception of the scale of the building or might suggest ways that a building improve its orientation to the street and the pedestrian who may be most negatively influenced by the scale of new development. The Design Guidelines may also recognize the character of a neighborhood and ensure that a new building's architecture or expression through materials, architectural features, or siting enhances the character of its surrounding, rather than imposing itself upon the surrounding area. Therefore, no significant adverse, long-term impacts are anticipated. Although no long-term impacts are anticipated, further discussion of various elements of the environment are warranted.

When the Northgate Comprehensive Plan was adopted, the area was rezoned to a more pedestrian neighborhood Commercial zone (Neighborhood Commercial – NC) from the auto-oriented (Commercial – C) zone predecessor. The overlay district provisions further defined major pedestrian street standards, requirements for street level uses, and other tools to establish and enhance the pedestrian character of the area.

The proposed neighborhood guidelines for the Northgate area provide a mechanism for further refinement of new development to a pedestrian orientation, recognizing the unique character of the neighborhood both good and bad, such as the large site sizes and predominance of parking areas and auto-oriented retail establishments. The guidelines augment the Citywide Design Guidelines for Site Planning, Height, Bulk and Scale, and Open Spaces and Connections. The intent of these guidelines is to enhance the streetscape and orientation of new development to a pedestrian or human scale, ensure the appropriate placement of open space, minimize vehicle/ pedestrian conflicts, enliven street level building frontages, recognize the key architectural and pedestrian value of street corners to the neighborhood, and improve the transition at key zone edges where larger-scale, higher density development meets lower-scale, lower density development. The guidelines also address the desirability of providing for pedestrian circulation among businesses and through large sites occupied by substantial open spaces or parking areas and its relationship to the overall pedestrian character of the area.

The proposed guidelines are not anticipated to result in adverse impacts on any element of the environment. The guidelines reflect the objectives of Northgate Area Comprehensive Plan, and the City of Seattle Comprehensive Plan in encouraging and supporting compact, mixed-use urban environments in which a mix of housing, commercial uses and essential neighborhood goods and services are located in close proximity to promote walking, bicycling and transit use. The Northgate Urban Center and Overlay District Design Guidelines further the City's urban village strategy by encouraging concentration of jobs and housing in urban centers or villages. This is further accomplished by enhancing the pedestrian values of an area, decreasing dependence on automobiles, encouraging the development of new housing and services, and establishing a tradition of quality urban neighborhoods and places through good design principles. These guidelines encourage the pedestrian environment to be of high design quality, safe, accessible, and inter-connected. If an aggregate of new development proposals are successful in responding to the intent of these neighborhood-specific design guidelines, it could be reasonably expected that multiple car trips –particularly within a mixed-use core – would be reduced.

The proposed Northgate Urban Center and Overlay District Design Guidelines, through provisions for enhanced pedestrian circulation, appropriately designed and located open spaces, and focus on scale relationships of new development will have the affect of reducing impacts on the neighborhood and promoting compatibility of new development with existing development where the context of existing development is desirable. Where the existing context is inconsistent with the future vision of the neighborhood and with the City's Comprehensive Plan Urban Centers and Villages strategy, the proposed guidelines will aid in the transition over time as new development is proposed, to a more pedestrian oriented future context.

The proposed guidelines through enhanced public open spaces and pedestrian circulation may have the affect of reducing dependence on automobiles, thereby reducing the level of congestion in the area, as well as the amount of air and noise pollution resulting from automobiles that currently congest the neighborhood throughout the day. An enhanced pedestrian and retail services environment will also improve the likelihood that housing may be built within the Center, as necessary to meeting growth projections and targets, important to the region-at-large.

The incorporation of strategically placed open spaces and landscaping, and reducing extensive impermeable surfaces used for automobile parking, will have a substantial positive affect on absorption of stormwater run-off that is tainted by internal combustion engine residues collected on paved surfaces provided for extensive auto orientation of existing developed sites.

Some members of the public have expressed concern over whether improved design quality might result in increased construction costs, as greater levels of architectural and construction detail, higher quality materials, and/or more complicated designs result from the design review process. Review of several hundred projects to date that have completed the design review process indicates no significant adverse impact with regard

to costs has resulted from design changes due to design review. Some additional design and/or construction costs may rise with some projects; however, the scale of such increases has been estimated to be less than one percent of total construction costs.

DECISION - SEPA

The decision was made after review by the responsible official on behalf of the lead agency or a completed environmental checklist and other information on file with the responsible department. This constitutes the Threshold Determination and form. The intent of this declaration is to satisfy the requirements of the State Environmental Policy Act (RCW 43.21C), including the requirement to inform the public agency decisions pursuant to SEPA.

☒ Determination of Non-Significance. This proposal has been determined to not have a significant adverse impact upon the environment. An EIS is not required under RCW 43.21C.030 2c.

☐ Determination of Significance. This proposal has or may have a significant adverse impact upon the environment. An EIS is required under RCW 43.21C.030 2c.

Signature _____

Scott Kemp

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Department of Design, Construction and Land Use

Date _____